WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Donate

DONATE | NEWS | SPORTS | EVENTS | FEATURES | OPINION | NEWSLETTER | CONTACT | ABOUT

NEWS

Winchester remembers Vinson-Owen family following Washington tragedy

PETER CASEY | STAFF WRITER

January 31, 2025 . 6:00 AM — 5 min read

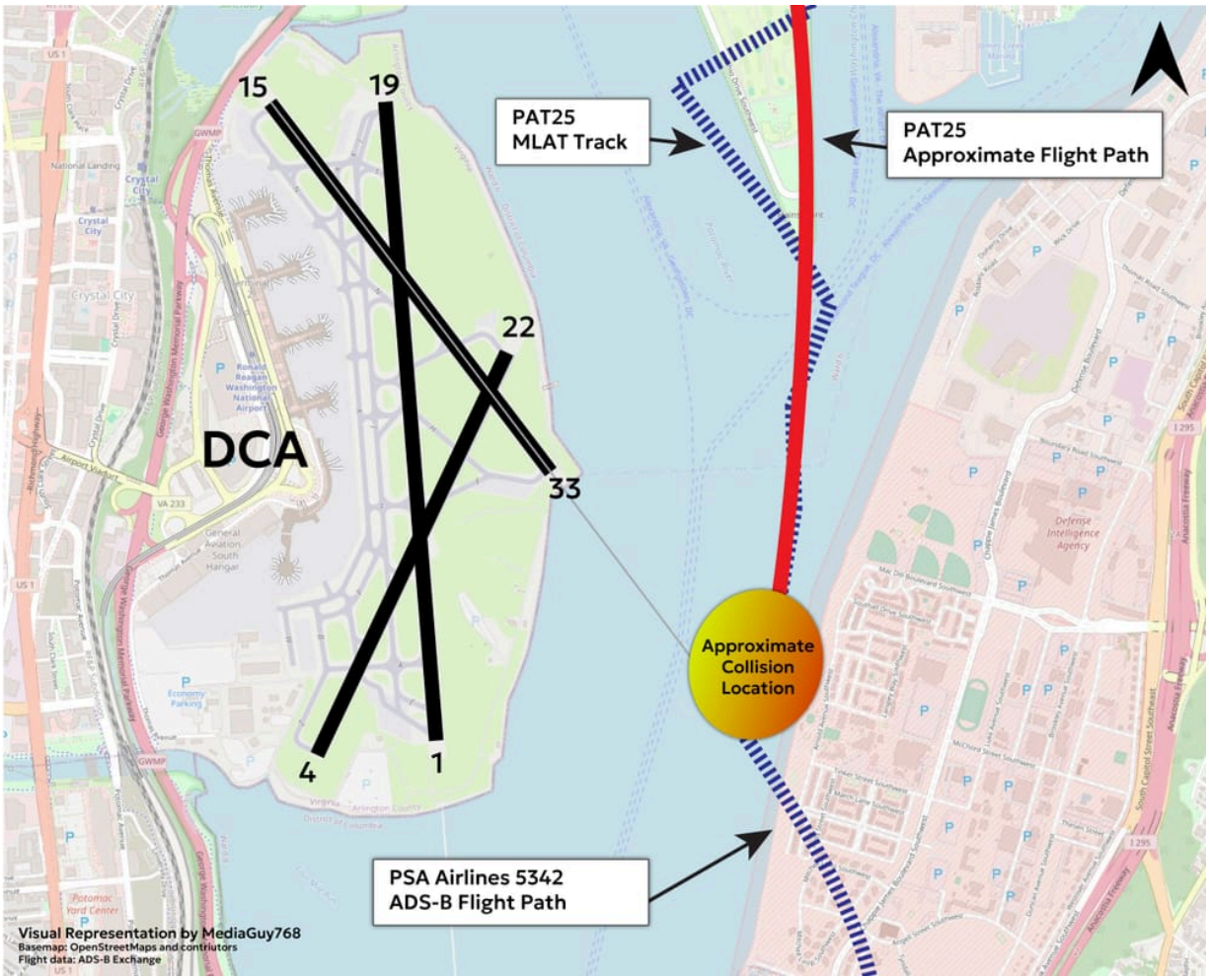
A pair of figure skates on the sign outside the Vinson-Owen Elementary School. Both the school's name and skates are in honor of the three Vinson-Owens family members lost in a plane crash in 1961. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/PETER CASEY

Subscribe

The Wednesday evening midair collision in Washington D.C. bet
Army Black Hawk helicopter and an American Airlines jet brought stark

reminders to Winchester residents of another airline tragedy that claimed the lives of a local family and the entire 1961 world team of U.S. figure skating.

The Jan. 29 crash just outside Reagan National Airport claimed the lives of six members of the Skating Club of Boston, and a total of 67 people in all.



Flight paths of the Black Hawk helicopter and American Airlines flight 5342, with the approximate location of the collision and the remainder of flight 5342's route. COURTESY PHOTO/WIKIPEDIA/MEDIAGUY768

Doug Zebhibe, executive director of the Skating Club of Boston, said the skating community lost part of its family.

“Last night and into this morning, we were informed of a pretty horrific tragedy. Fourteen skaters returning home from the national development camp at Wichita, Kansas put on by U.S. Figure Skating were lost

Subscribe

crash," he said. "Of those 14, six were from the Skating Club of Boston. Two coaches, two teenage athletes, and the athletes' moms."

Holding back tears Zebhibe added, "Skating is a very close and tight knit community. These kids and their parents they're here at our facility in Norwood six and sometimes seven days a week. It's a close tight bond and I think for all of us we have lost family."

Winchester tragedy

As news of the Washington D.C. crash spread, Winchester residents immediately took to the residents Facebook page, reminding others of the 1961 crash that killed nine-time U.S. national figure skating champion Maribel Vinson-Owen and her two daughters Maribel Owen, 20, winner of the 1961 U.S. Nationals Championship, and her sister, Laurence Owen, 16, winner of the 1961 U.S. figure skating championship.

All 18 members of the United States Figure Skating National Team were killed on Feb. 15, 1961 when the airplane they were on crashed in Belgium while attempting to land. The team was on its way to the World Championships in Prague.

Also killed in the accident were 16 officials, judges, coaches and family members, as well as 27 other passengers and 11 flight crew members.

Subscribe

Laurence Owen, left, was the U.S. Ladies Champion in 1961 and her sister Maribel, right, was part of the pairs team representing the U.S. in 1961. Their mother, Maribel Vinson-Owen, was a nine-time champion and coach. All of them were killed in the 1961 plane crash. COURTESY PHOTO/FORUM ARCHIVE

For years, officials were left puzzled by what caused the accident, but according to The New York Daily News, "investigators eventually determined the jet's stabilizers were probably to blame."

In a post titled "thinking of the Vinson Owen family today," one resident responded the Washington incident "brings the whole story back."

"Was one of the first things that came to mind when I heard men
the skating team were onboard [sic] the plane that crashed," another

Subscribe

resident said.

One resident shared a memory of growing up on Woodside Road and "often seeing the Owen's [sic] girls practicing on Winter Pond early in the morning."

Donate today!

Another added that many Winchester High School grads of the late 50's and early 60's would find the recent crash "eerily similar" to the Belgium accident.

At the Vinson-Owen Elementary School, which is named after the family, the sign entering the school's parking lot has a pair of figure skates commemorating the lost skaters.

Reactions by skating community

Stoneham native and two-time Olympic champion Nancy Kerrigan choked back tears as she spoke at the Skating Club of Boston, saying she came to the club to share in the grief.

"Not sure how to process it which is why I'm here," Kerrigan said. "We just wanted to be here and be part of our community. Anytime I've been able to be here and watch them grow. The kids here really work hard, their parents work hard to be here. I feel for the athletes, the skaters, and their families, but anyone that was on that plane, not just the skaters because it's just such a tragic event.

"We've been through tragedies before as Americans, as people and we are strong, and I guess it's how we respond to it and so my response i with people I care about and I love and I needed support," Kerrig

Subscribe

Maribel Vinson-Owen, left, Maribel Owen with her partner Chuck Foster in 1956 and Laurence Owen were all killed in a plane crash in 1961, but are remembered for their skating prowess. COURTESY PHOTOS/OLYMPEDIA

Just as it did in the aftermath of the 1961 crash, the Skating Club of Boston described the impact of this type of tragedy on skating's future.

"This will have long reaching impact for our skating community," Zebhibe said. "The two coaches Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, they were the top coaches, they were the 1994 world pair champions and were very much a part of our building the competitive skating program at the Skating Club of Boston. It's a major personal loss but also a loss to our skating community.

"Almost half of everybody on board that 1961 plane was from this club," he continued. "It had long-reaching implications for the skating club and for the sport in this country because when you lose coaches like this, you lose the future of the sport as well. It's been a long time in redeveloping it and I personally feel that this club has just now, almost 60 years later, been coming out of the shadow of that 1961 crash. So, this is particularly devastating. "

The two coaches were a married couple and were recruited to the Skating Club of Boston in 2017. Their son, Max, was also competing, but returned to Boston after his Jan. 27 competition.

Subscribe

Maribel Owen and her skating partner Dudley Richards with their trophy for winning the U.S. pairs championship in 1961. Laurence Owen also won the U.S. National Championship in 1961. All three were killed in the plane crash in Belgium. COURTESY PHOTO/OLYMPEDIA

Source material was used from the following publications:
Winchester Star/Wicked Local story on Historical Society talk on Maribel Vinson Owen and her influence on American Figure Skating.

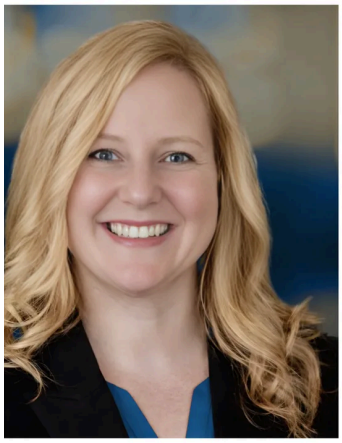
Winchester Archival Center

Winchester News editor Nell Escobar Coakley contributed to this report.

Winchester News is a non-profit organization supported by our community. If you appreciate having local Winchester news, please donate to support our work, and subscribe to our free weekly newsletter.

Related

Subscribe



NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER
March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses

NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for rente

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis

Subscribe

as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

March 3, 2026

Latest

PROMOTING HEALTH & EMPOWERMENT
HEAR FROM HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS
LEARN THROUGH INTERACTIVE GAMES
MEET NEW PEOPLE
FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY
Middle school & high school students, teachers, parents, friends, community members - come and bring a friend!
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
EMAIL OFFICE@NFSJ.ORG
CALL 781-729-7100
NETWORK for SOCIAL JUSTICE
FROM WINCHESTER AND CHELSEA
GIRL UP
WOMEN IN STEM
GIRLS GOTTA RUN
MIND & MATTER

EVENTS

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

Subscribe

FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Subscribe to Winchester News

Subscribe

© 2026 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with permission for non-commercial use only.

Subscribe